

Buffalo, Colliers and Cedar Creek: Residential Working Group Meeting
Effinger Fire Hall, Rockbridge County
May 8, 2014

Participants

Bea Brown	Clyde Cooper
Jim Simons	Elizabeth Cooper
Joe Irby	Cathy Campbell
Larry Evans	Steve Richards
Glen Knowles	J. Oscar Hall
Brenda Noto	

The meeting began with a discussion of the cost of septic system maintenance and installation. Participants were surprised to learn that the Health Department recommends pumping out your septic tank every three to five years. One participant noted that they recently had their tank pumped and it cost about \$200. It was noted that the highly engineered alternative waste treatment systems can cost as much as \$30,000. There is also an inspection fee of \$200/year. An operation and maintenance plan is required along with regular pump outs of the system when applicable. Many properties in the area have problems with soil percolation, meaning that the number of failing septic systems that will need to be replaced with alternative waste treatment systems will be high. The group thought that for new properties, 25% of septic systems installed end up being conventional systems while 75% are alternative waste treatment systems.

The group discussed the fact that failing septic systems that are close to streams are likely to be contributing a greater amount of bacteria to the water than those further upland. Correcting or replacing these systems will be important. However, many homeowners in the area do not have the funds available to pay for these corrections on their own. One participant noted that you can't build in the 100 yr floodplain in the county any more. There are many systems that should be "grandfathered" in because it would not be possible to rebuild or relocate their septic systems outside of the floodplain.

The group moved on to discuss ideas for education and outreach for septic systems. It was noted that funding will be critical. One participant estimated that 90% of homeowners will not be able to fix their septic systems without some financial assistance. Grant funds should be targeted at homes in the floodplain, and to those without treatment systems that are having the greatest impact on water quality. Motivating factors should be considered when developing outreach materials. Well testing might be a good way to reach homeowners since a failing septic system can impact well water. Several years ago an organization (possibly Virginia Tech) came to the area and offered well water testing at a discounted rate (\$60 versus the typical \$250). Something similar could be done in the region once again. Free or discounted septic pump-outs and inspections would also be a good way to encourage homeowners to maintain their systems. It was noted that fear and distrust of the government will be an issue with any type of government sponsored program. If there are other funds available (non government), that would be helpful.

The Working Group was very concerned with the socioeconomic level of homeowners needing assistance. Many families have lived in the same home for generations with little outside income or

assistance. Long term, low-interest loans could be one option along with cost share programs. Assistance from within the community would be preferred over outside help. A volunteer labor force could be mobilized to assist with outreach and implementation efforts. Other local organizations that could provide some assistance were identified including:

- Universities
- Churches
- Habitat for Humanity
- Rockbridge Area Conservation Council
- Ruritan Clubs
- Community Foundation

The group discussed the cost of a typical repair of a malfunctioning septic system. It was estimated that these can cost anywhere from \$1,800-\$5,000. Several companies do septic tank pump-outs in the Rockbridge County area, including Hamilton, Ayers, and C&S Disposal.

VDH has a map of older systems dated from about 1960 to the present in the county. Participants noted that there is an exemption for outhouses in Rockbridge County legal code provided that they have a tank that can be pumped out (e.g. a Pump-and-Haul system)

Several participants expressed an interest in volunteer water quality monitoring and suggested several groups that could assist with that effort including VA Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners, VA Military Academy and Washington and Lee University.

The group agreed that Thursday_nights work well for meetings, but participants would like to consider a different location. The Moose Lodge near Lexington and the Palmer Community Center were suggested as potential locations.